

Four Corners

Description

Four Corners is an individual technique for checking for understanding. It works best in a classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing and defending their own ideas without being influenced by others' responses.

Purpose

Four Corners is used with selected response questions to identify groups of students with similar responses to the question asked. Students move a corner of the room designated to match their response or similar way of thinking.

How it improves student learning

Four Corners provides an opportunity for students to make their ideas public. By meeting "in the corner" with students who have similar ideas, students can further discuss and clarify their own thinking with others before returning to their seats and engaging in discussion with the class or small groups of students with different ideas. In the process of explaining their thinking, students sometimes notice gaps or inconsistencies in their own reasoning and question whether they have enough information to be certain their ideas are plausible.

How it informs instruction

Four Corners allows teachers to visually see which idea individual students have as well as which idea is most prevalent in the class. By circulating among corners as students are discussing and clarifying their ideas, the teacher gains insight into students' ideas they assume to be true at the point in time.

How it works

- Teacher chooses a selected response assessment that includes an explanation and labels or indicates the four corners of a room with the letter or name that matches the response.
- Students individually think through their response, commit to an answer, and write their explanation.
- When students are finished with the task, teacher directs students to go to the corner of the room that matches their selected response. Give students up to five minutes to share and discuss their thinking with others who selected the same response.

Variations

- Teachers can follow up the discussion at the *Four Corners* with a class debate about the ideas by having students return to their seats for mixed small group and whole-class discussion.
- Students may remain in each of the corners and work together as a group to support their arguments in front of their peers. As students listen to and consider the arguments of other groups, they may move to a different corner when they give up their idea in favor of a new one. The challenge is to try to get all students over to one corner, ideally the one that represents the correct answer.
- Use different areas of the room or designated tables for more than four responses, or use only three corners for selected response items that include fewer than four responses.